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Source: *Cultural Critique*, No. 62 (Winter, 2006), pp. 92-125

Published by: University of Minnesota Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4489237>

Accessed: 07/01/2010 22:35

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FUNDAMENTALISM HOT AND COLD

GEORGE W. BUSH AND THE "RETURN OF THE SACRED"

Klaus J. Milich

An American fundamentalist is an evangelical who is militant in opposition to liberal theology in the churches or to changes in cultural values or mores, such as those associated with "secular humanism." . . . Fundamentalists are a subtype of evangelicals and militancy is crucial to their outlook. Fundamentalists are not just religious conservatives, they are conservatives who are willing to take a stand and to fight.

—George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*

Not long ago, historians Heinrich August Winkler and Abbott Gleason speculated in *Die Zeit* and the *Boston Review* whether the United States currently faces a historical moment that Germany went through on the eve of the Weimar Republic, that is, a "conservative revolution." The term was coined and applied by right-wing intellectuals at the time to attack the liberal "Zeitgeist" of the Weimar Republic. They considered the German chaos of the 1920s as proof of the Hobbesian pandemonium that modern liberal democracies and modernity in general produce. The most influential proponent of this illiberal phalanx was political and legal philosopher Carl Schmitt who, like Martin Heidegger, joined the Nazi Party in May 1933 and became one of its primary philosophical proponents.

In his essay "If Power Administers Justice," Winkler relates Schmitt's famous friend/enemy distinction to the Bush administration's unilateral politics, asserting that it echoes Schmitt's conservative response to modern liberalism's alleged softness. Gleason finds a similar cultural bond in the Bush administration's "imperial foreign policy and its tax cuts, which . . . are deliberately aimed at starving the welfare state." Connecting the nation's social security to imperial politics paved the "hard road to fascism," as Gleason terms it. Mussolini and Hitler,

who focused their imperial ideology on ancient Rome and the millennial idea of a "Thousand Year Empire," saw an inevitable connection between militarism, imperialism, and curtailing the state's commitment to popular welfare—and it is this connection that for Gleason resounds in U.S. foreign policy. In other words, Winkler's and Gleason's associations of George W. Bush's "conservative revolution" with that of the Weimar Republic—a revolution that led straight into fascism—insinuate that the United States is historically in a similar situation.¹

And indeed, the Patriot Act, the scandalous practices at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, the debacle about the election of 2000 and the enduring stretching of the facts in the 2004 campaign, not to speak of the media's voluntary subordination to politics and its renunciation of critical distance, bolster the notion that the United States has fallen prey to totalitarian practices. Against this array of incidents, it is difficult to imagine that the "fundamentally un-American" wrongdoing at Abu Ghraib, as George W. Bush and Donald Rumsfeld termed it, is just the failure of some evil individuals in an otherwise good society. The accumulation of events rather speaks for a structural problem disquieting for a nation so proud of its democracy. But even if the term "un-American" is the euphemism for antidemocratic practices, I wonder whether insinuations of fascism are the appropriate frame to explain the Bush administration's conservative revolution. Apart from the fact that any equation with German Nazism minimizes and sanitizes the Holocaust, I would argue that the underlying teleology of this approach is already misleading. It assumes that conservatism taken to its extreme would always and ultimately lead to fascism. This monistic perspective prevents us from considering the possibility of conservative alternatives. The attempt to associate the current "conservative revolution" in the United States with Italian and German fascism fails to account for the decisive role of religion in America, which in its most extreme form also threatens liberal democracy, but on different grounds than Europe's "hard road to fascism."²

In the following pages I will generate an alternative trajectory of the current "conservative revolution." By way of acknowledging (rather than blurring) the differences between Weimar's leading right-wing intellectual and his U.S.-American counterparts, the fascist-fundamentalist dichotomy becomes a framework for elucidating two different conservative substantiations of politics, which reveal a

geopolitical difference that in part accounts for the recent political and cultural tensions in the transatlantic sphere. This difference manifests itself in the notion that European practices of totalitarian conservatism follow a secular order, whereas their American counterparts draw their legitimization from metaphysical, that is, divine order. Accordingly, fascism appears to be the totalitarian aberration of Europe's secularization process as much as Christian fundamentalism in the United States is the totalitarian anomaly of religious resistance against the secularization process. The dichotomy, I am suggesting here, corresponds with and reflects a debate that has concerned sociologists of religion for more than two decades.³ What is at stake in this debate is the validity of the secularization paradigm outlined first by Saint-Simon in the late eighteenth century and developed further in its classical form by Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber (see Gorski 2000; and Swatos and Christiano 1999).

This paradigm designated the displacement of religious authority for rational knowledge. From the sixteenth century onward, as Weber argued, the world gradually became a self-contained causal nexus in which events could be explained within our profane experiences themselves. Appeals to divine authority and explanations referring to forces outside of this world had lost their credibility. Although Weber granted religion a catalytic role in the emergence of modernity, the development of the modern nation state, and its economic system, he nevertheless considered supernatural belief systems as bound to abdicate to the force of rationality and, at length, to retreat to a private realm set apart from the sphere of art, science, and morality.

Of course, Weber's notion has not been unanimously accepted. Especially in the United States, the successful taming of ecclesiastical authority has been challenged again and again. The most pertinent example is the religious crisis of American Protestantism in the Progressive Era. During this period, every protestant denomination was faced with profound challenges to their faith. Darwinism, new historical, sociological, and psychological explanations, and rapid secularization, especially in the sciences and in higher education, challenged the authority of the Bible and essentially split the American evangelical tradition in two. While modern theological liberals were willing to modify some central evangelical doctrines in order to maintain better credibility in the modern age, conservatives continued to believe in

the literacy of the Bible. By the 1920s, a militant wing of conservatives emerged, which by the middle of the decade had gained wide national prominence. This wing included Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Disciples, Episcopalians, and Pentecostals alike. Named after *The Fundamentals*, a widely distributed twelve-volume paperback series published between 1910 and 1915, fundamentalists left the mainline Protestant denominations and made the separation a test of true faith. It is important to note that fundamentalism did not become a denomination in itself but a movement that cuts across all Protestant churches (Marsden 1991, 3).

The emergence of a fundamentalist movement in the 1920s, the revivalism of the 1950s,⁴ the political formation of the Christian Right in the 1970s, and finally the global “return of the sacred” and the renewed “deprivatization of religion,” as scholars have come to term the worldwide religious revival, has led sociologists of religion to reconsider and revise the secularization theory of the early twentieth century. Despite terminological varieties and theoretical disagreements between advocates and adversaries of the secularization paradigm, most scholars agree that the traditional theory offers a relatively plausible account of religious developments in modern Europe. In its institutional as well as in its individual manifestations, they argue, religion is generally doing much better in the United States than in Europe. Progressive religious decline was so much taken for granted that what required an explanation was the American “deviation” from the European “norm,” rather than the other way around. As a consequence of this asymmetry, José Casanova suggests a revision of two basic premises: The first concerns the assumption of secularization as a general teleological process of modern social change. It is time to abandon the Eurocentric view that modern Western European developments, including the secularization of Western Christianity, are general universal processes, he writes. The more one adopts a global perspective, the more it becomes obvious that the drastic secularization of Western European societies is the exception rather than the rule. The second concerns the causality between secularization and modernization, which builds upon the assumption (also taken for granted for too long) that the more modern a society, the more secular it becomes—a Eurocentric assumption, many critics say, that can no longer be maintained (Casanova 2003, 3–9).

If Max Weber assumed secularization to be a linear, gradually ascending, and irreversible development encompassing all parts of society, this process has remained a contested ground in the United States ever since. In contrast to Europe's awakening from premodern worldviews, America developed not as a whole from religious to secular but simultaneously from revival to revival. In other words, the United States has always moved between two extremes, that is, between religious fundamentalism and enlightened secularism, a dichotomy that is represented by the legacies of Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards on the one hand, and Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson on the other. If George W. Bush is said to have split the country and cut it off from the Western world, then it is exactly along this line.

How then does one understand the coexistence and interaction of these mutually exclusive traditions? Enhancing Max Weber's theory of modernization as a continuous process of secularization, Jürgen Habermas has provided a useful categorization to begin with. In his Theodor W. Adorno Prize speech, published in 1981 as "Modernity—An Incomplete Project" of the Enlightenment, Habermas distinguishes three forms of conservative attacks against modernity: those of the neoconservatives, of the young conservatives, and of the old conservatives (9). Habermas's critique of the neoconservatives has to be understood against the backdrop of the crisis of modernity in the 1960s. In contradistinction to the religious crisis at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, this crisis remained within the realm of secular worldviews, a crisis that coalesced around a number of profane dichotomies such as high versus mass culture, the humanities versus the sciences, culture versus civilization, and critical reason versus mere operational thought. Since the Enlightenment, these dichotomies have been the basis of an inherent antagonism that splits *modernity* into a cultural sphere of *modernism* and the social, technological, and economic progress of *modernization*. Habermas claims that, instead of reconciling both spheres, neoconservatives favor only one side of modernity. They welcome the process of modernization only to carry forward technical progress, rational administration, and capitalist growth. In order to eliminate any critical interference, neoconservatives recommend a politics of defusing the explosive content of the cultural sphere. Besides Gottfried Benn and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Habermas names

Carl Schmitt, and he might have added others mentioned in his earlier writings, such as Charles Percy Snow, Daniel Bell, or neoliberal proponents of economic globalization.

This notion did not change with the emergence of postmodernism in the 1970s, when poststructuralists questioned the epistemological foundation of the modernism-modernization dichotomy. Habermas identifies this line with Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, whose renunciation of modern key concepts repudiated modernity's critical categories. Instead of appreciating their deconstruction of modern key terms as a necessary critique of the universal ideas of the Enlightenment—that is, as a differentiation of dualism, hierarchy, center, structure, causality, and other epistemological concepts—Habermas could understand the poststructuralist revision of modernity only in terms of conservatism.⁵

More important than the misconception of the postmodern intellectuals as young conservatives is the third attack against modernity, which Habermas locates on the other end of the modern spectrum. He identifies this attack with old conservatives. Taking issue with the young conservatives, the neoconservatives, and progressives like Habermas himself, old conservatives resent both the critical sphere of modernism and the technical, economic, and social progress of modernization. Old conservatives observe modern worldviews with concern and sadness and recommend a withdrawal from modernity altogether to a *status quo ante*. This school originated with Leo Strauss, an almost forgotten philosopher who came to new prominence with George W. Bush's conservative revolution.⁶

Although Habermas's admonition against Strauss more than twenty years ago was farsighted and anticipatory, one has to name a fourth offense against modernity, an offense that in its specific American configuration was barely visible when Habermas published his essay in 1981. For the sake of simplicity, I would call this form "fundamentalist conservatism" because it resents any rational explanation of history and the universe at large. While old conservatives accept at least Darwin's evolutionism, fundamentalist conservatives believe in creationism. The only explanation they accept is that of the Bible, which to them foretells in detail the course of human history and the universe at large. They take the account of the genesis, the biblical miracles and prophecies, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, and finally his

physical return, literally. In its most militant form, this apocalyptic notion of history originated in the mid-nineteenth century. It flourished throughout the Gilded Age, has hidden in the dark since the New Deal, and revived again with the foundation of the Moral Majority in 1979 and the formation of the Christian Right (Ammerman 1991).

It is the agenda of fundamentalist conservatives in alliance with old conservatives from which George W. Bush's first administration received its arguments. Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his former assistant Paul Wolfowitz expressed the "old conservative" perspective in the cabinet, whereas Attorney General John Ashcroft and the president himself represented the fundamentalist conservative wing in the first Bush administration.⁷ With occasional appropriations of neoconservative elements of the Reagan era, both fractions—fundamentalists and old conservatives—instrumentalized each other for their mutual interest, particularly in the Near East. Within this network, Secretary of State Colin Powell appeared to be just a figurehead to please the European allies and those in the United States who still believe in the Republican Party's neo-conservative agenda, a platform that the Grand Old Party has gradually transformed over the past twenty-five years.

As Winkler and Gleason point out, one has to start with Carl Schmitt's neoconservative philosophy to understand the trajectory of George W. Bush's political theory and the Republican Party's shift. In 1928, Schmitt published an essay, passionately discussed at the time and still one of the most controversial but important tracts of political thought in the twentieth century, titled "The Concept of the Political." Outraged at the legal consequences of the Versailles treaty of 1919 and its political effects, the essay is an exploration into the characteristics of the modern state. Witnessing the ferocious quarrels between the left and the right in the Weimar era, Schmitt was particularly interested in the centrifugal forces that were responsible for tearing the young republic apart. Because a state cannot exist without a sovereign authority but presupposes a concept of the political, the disintegrating forces led Schmitt to the fundamental question of the relationship between state and politics.

Following Max Weber's secularization theory, Schmitt discerned a notion of politics in the history of the European nations that enabled

rules and regulations to emerge, which manifested themselves in the *jus publicum Europaenum* and the development of the modern sovereign state. With Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, and Thomas Hobbes, “a doctrine began to take shape in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [that] endowed the state with an important monopoly: the European state became the subject of politics.”⁸ Until then, the political was separated from the state and in one way or another brought into relation with it. In an unsatisfactory circle, the state appeared as something political, and the political as something pertaining to the state. Their mere juxtaposition is reflected in a variety of practical, technical, and administrative definitions of the political, “which contain nothing more than additional references to the state” (22). For Schmitt, those definitions suffice only “as long as the state is truly a clear and unequivocal eminent entity confronting nonpolitical groups and affairs,” in other words, for as long as the state possesses the administrative monopoly on politics to rule the various domains of society (22).

The simple coexistence of the two spheres entailed a variety of antithetical relations between the religious, cultural, economic, legal, and scientific affairs of the state and the political. The separation of these affairs from the political resulted in the ostensible neutrality of these domains. “The equation state = politics becomes erroneous and deceptive at exactly the moment when state and society penetrate each other. What had been up to that point affairs of state become thereby social matters, and, vice versa, what had been purely social matters become affairs of state—as must necessarily occur in a democratically organized unit.” Tracing the development from the “absolute state” of the eighteenth century via the noninterventionist “neutral state” of the nineteenth century to the “total state” of the twentieth century, the latter appears to Schmitt as “a polemical concept against such neutralizations and depoliticalizations.” Embracing all important domains, everything in such a state is, therefore, “at least potentially political, and in referring to the state it is no longer possible to assert for it a specifically political characteristic.” With respect to the Weimar Republic, Schmitt concludes that “democracy must do away with all the typical distinctions and depoliticalizations characteristic of the liberal nineteenth century” and resolve the state-society contrast, in which the state monopoly of the political appears as the antithesis of the religious, cultural, economic, legal, and scientific domain (22–23).

Having clarified the relation between state and politics, Schmitt goes on to elucidate what exactly the political is, arguing that an understanding can be obtained only by discovering and defining its specific and distinctive categories. Assuming “that in the realm of morality the final distinctions are between good and evil, in aesthetics beautiful and the ugly, in economics profitable and unprofitable, . . . the distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy.” The categorical distinctions and the relative independence of the various domains do not, however, alter the fact that the political enemy remains “the other, the stranger . . . something existentially different and alien” (26–27).

This crucial aspect of the political, which at times might derive its energy from the religious, economic, moral, and other antithesis, has been lost in the development of liberal democracy and the modern nation-state, Schmitt insists. “Liberalism in one of its typical dilemmas of intellect and economics has attempted to transform the enemy from the viewpoint of economics into a competitor and from the intellectual point of view into a debating adversary. . . . One may or may not share these hopes and pedagogic ideals. But, rationally speaking, it cannot be denied that nations continue to group themselves according to the friend/enemy antithesis, that the distinction still remains actual today, and that this is an ever present possibility for every people existing in the political sphere” (28).

Schmitt’s concept of the political stands in opposition to what he calls “political romanticism,” which to his understanding is mere utopianism. Romantic political theories can never be truly political because they are based on optimistic notions about human nature. In contrast, “genuine political theories presuppose man to be evil” (61). Therefore, “humanity can not wage war because it has no enemy” (54). From this perspective, Schmitt concluded that the historical conjunction of liberalism and democracy has obscured the binary opposition of those who are with you and those against whom you struggle. Liberal democracy tends toward political romanticism because it rests on compromise in which all solutions are temporary, occasional, but never decisive. Insofar as there is no last word on anything, liberal democracies undermine the possibility of the political in that they substitute discursive procedure for struggle. For Schmitt, only genuine politics is based on a conception of making singular, absolute, and final decisions.

Hence, the “political” is the arena of authority rather than of negotiation and is a self-contained world of rules and general law (see also Holmes 1993 and Drury 1997, 81–96).

Schmitt’s friend/enemy matrix became essential to the conservative attacks against the Weimar Republic and to conservative thinking in general, exemplified in the Bush administration’s belligerent rhetoric based on a strong sense for who is inside and who is not. The fierce we/you matrix echoed in the president’s repeated formula that the “United States is the greatest country” and “Americans are the best people in the world”; it resonated in the government’s unilateralism and its quarrels with the United Nations over the War Crimes Court Agreement and the Kyoto Protocols; it reverberated in Donald Rumsfeld’s distinction between an old and a new Europe, and it resounded in Robert Kagan’s widely discussed essay on “Power and Weakness,” which considered Americans to be from Mars, whereas “Euroweenies” and “pansies” inhabit Venus.

But not all conservatives agree with Schmitt’s rational concept of the political. Among his American disciples is someone in particular who, as a result of his own experiences in both the Weimar Republic and the United States, not only radicalized Schmitt’s political philosophy but came to the forefront of American politics with the inauguration of George W. Bush: Leo Strauss, the mentor of the American “old conservatives” and, like Schmitt, one of the most controversial but influential political philosophers of the twentieth century. What distinguishes Strauss from other conservative political philosophers is his attempt to integrate the conflicting legacies of American political thought, which from the foundation of the United States was torn between secular and divine substantiations. Several critical collections document the conflicting interpretations of his work even among his most consequential students.⁹ Instead of rehearsing the disagreement about how best to characterize his legacy, I will focus on Strauss’s role as mediator between Carl Schmitt’s political philosophy and American fundamentalism.

In 1932, as a young student of political theory, Strauss published a critique of Schmitt’s essay on “The Concept of the Political.” In it Strauss had no objections to Schmitt’s problematic friend/enemy binarism. In fact, he didn’t care as much about the categories as about

Schmitt's philosophical frame of reference. Strauss denounced Schmitt's reprobation of liberalism for not being radical enough, because Schmitt's general principles of understanding still remained in the "horizon of liberalism" itself (105). According to these principles, Schmitt proposes that the political is prior to the state, which for Strauss "cannot be meant to express an eternal truth, but only a present truth" (81). For a metaphysical philosopher like Strauss, however, truth has no presence. Truth neither depends on historical contingencies nor is accessible to rational faculties. For Strauss, truth is rooted in logic and faith beyond the physical world. For Strauss, technocratic, legalistic, and empirical criticism of liberal democracy is all very well but not enough. Neither the concept of the political nor the state and its various domains are the initial problem for Strauss, but rather modernity and the process of secularization itself. Schmitt's dismantling of politics, economy, science, morality, and art from any metaphysical and divine revelation was, therefore, just another failure of modern rationality. In other words, Schmitt's criticism could only be completed if it arrived at a "horizon beyond liberalism." As liberalism is the logical outcome of the philosophical principles of modernity, Strauss thought it necessary to understand the differences between ancient and modern political philosophy, the relation between theology and politics, between revelation and reason, all of which modernity has separated and submitted to rational explanation.¹⁰

Over the next two years after the publication of his critique, Strauss wrote several letters to Carl Schmitt questioning aspects of his argument, which Schmitt never answered. In his revision of the book, however, Schmitt changed a number of passages in response to Strauss's criticism, without acknowledgment.¹¹ One can only speculate about the reason, although considering Schmitt's engagement in Nazi ideology, it seems obvious why he omitted any reference to a young Jewish scholar. Looking at contemporary American politics, however, it seems that Strauss receives ample compensation for Schmitt's denial of acknowledgment. Last year, a number of prominent magazines, weeklies, and journals on both sides of the Atlantic extensively disclosed the impact of Leo Strauss's political philosophy on the Bush administration, often with a timbre of investigative reporting as if it were to unmask a conspiracy theory.¹² Dubbed the "godfather of the conservative revolution," Strauss was not only considered the shadowy force behind the

Bush administration and the Republican Party but essential to what has since the early 1980s slowly but steadily developed into a religiously inflected conservative revolution in the United States.

Born in Germany in 1899, Leo Strauss was a Jewish refugee who came to the United States in 1938, where he first taught at the New School for Social Research and then became a professor of classical political philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1949.¹³ Until his death in 1973, Strauss remained a conservative patriot who backed the United States against Nazi Germany in World War II and, as a bold anticommunist, against the Soviet Union in the Cold War. During his lifetime, Strauss was barely known to the wider American public. What distinguishes him from his conservative contemporaries, however, is that he was able to build something of a school, the only conservative school ever to amount to anything in the academic world.¹⁴ The leading spokesmen among the Straussians are or were Harry Jaffa, Harvey Mansfield, and Allan Bloom, author of *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). All three and many others were either students of Strauss or admirers and associates who acknowledged his profound influence on their thought.

What seems more important than his influence inside the academy is the impact that Strauss exerted on American politics over the past twenty years. The Straussian school is the first conservative school of its kind that has come very close to the center of power. The list of Strauss's students or students of his students who have assumed, at various times, important positions in Washington since Ronald Reagan took office is too long to be mentioned here.¹⁵

The Straussians in the universities and those in politics are connected through a close network of think tanks that evolved over the past thirty years. Their number increased from 59 in 1970 to more than 300 think tanks in the mid-1990s. Initially considered to be politically independent, nonprofit organizations to do research on a variety of political and social issues, those think tanks no longer think but rather advocate certain political perspectives. In 1970 only 30 percent of them associated themselves with either the Democrats or the Republicans, whereas today almost none of the 300 think tanks is politically independent. Only one-third associate themselves with the Democratic party, whereas two-thirds identify themselves with conservative political theories and programs.¹⁶

What unites Strauss's disciples is their perspective on liberal democracy, which they consider to be a platform that encourages tyranny. The inherent tolerance of modern liberalism, as they argue in one way or the other, contains an intrinsic tendency toward dissent within a society, which weakens the society's ability to cope with external threats. Straussians see cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, and intercultural relations as a utopian political order in which all opinions, all preferences, and all religions are of equal worth—a political order that has lost sight of its enemies. Strauss himself experienced this in the Weimar Republic, which he thought promoted its own destruction by way of tolerating both communists and Nazis.

More important, however, was his experience of being raised as a Jew in a liberal democracy. Strauss described himself as entangled in the dilemma between Jewish theology and liberal politics. The equal rights that the Weimar Republic secured for the Jews could have no effect upon their assimilation, as Strauss thought, because liberal democracy is a secular order. It creates a society that is neither Christian nor Jewish, a society that allows for the mere juxtaposition and pluralism of different worldviews and religions, a society in which religion and politics are separate and where all citizens, regardless of their affiliation, have equal rights before the law. Liberal freedom is freedom from legal interference into the private sphere. And since the private sphere is protected by law, liberal societies implicitly "protect," "permit," and even "foster" private discrimination against Jews by groups or individuals. Therefore, liberalism cannot protect minorities and can therefore not be considered a solution to the Jewish problem, not even in the United States, where liberalism is deeply entrenched and advanced. To put it bluntly, the delegation of religion to the private sphere does not prevent but rather motivates private discrimination. Strauss concluded that an effective prohibition of discrimination would necessitate the elimination of the private sphere. Only a state that does not separate between church and state, a political order based on the principles of a single religion can prevent discrimination (Strauss 1997; Drury 1997, 34–35).

In his essay "Why We Remain Jews," Strauss goes a step further, arguing that "there is no solution to the Jewish problem" (49). In fact, Strauss doubted that there will ever be a solution, because he thought God had chosen the Jews as an example for persecution and

redemption: "The Jewish people and their fate are the living witness for the absence of redemption. This, one could say, is the meaning of the chosen people" (60). Believing that the solution to the Jewish problem must be a divine one, and not a human one, Strauss refused political and cultural Zionism, because it replaced divine redemption by political activism within the secular horizon of liberal democracies. Judaism, he maintained, cannot be understood in mere political terms or as a culture. The substance of Judaism is "divine revelation." Thus, the Jewish nation is a religious nation, which must cling to its faith against the secular influence of modernity. It has its foundation not in history and politics but in the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and the Midrash. It is not informed by the contingencies of everyday life but by the eternal law of God. Leo Pinsker's and Franz Rosenzweig's pursuits of assimilation were, therefore, "a radical break with the principles of the Jewish tradition" (51), a break that started with Spinoza, "a great man, but not a good Jew" (50). In his critique of Spinoza, the first modern, Jewish philosopher who questioned the authority and literacy of the Bible, Strauss complained that a fundamental belief has been lost in the process of secularization, both for Christians and for Jews.¹⁷ (That does not mean that Strauss was a deeply religious Jew.)

At the heart of Strauss's appeal is his effort to transcend historical understanding and to recover the truth of past philosophers. Strauss believed, as Allan Bloom put it, "that the truth is eternal, that one can study an old writer as one would a contemporary and that the only concern is what is written, as opposed to its historical, economic, or psychological background" (Bloom 1974, 385). Strauss, therefore, turned to Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers who derived their value judgments and distinctions between good and evil from higher, metaphysical powers. Their writings, Strauss thought, were not yet contaminated by the contingencies of history and politics. Recovering their eternal truth, however, would not be easy, for it was overlaid by pioneers and proponents of the Enlightenment, who took earthly existence seriously and based government not on transcendental ideals but on the way mankind actually lives. Their modern notions of history and politics eroded Western culture and the metaphysical tradition of Greek philosophy. Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke, for example, derived the standards for their political order from the dynamics of history rather than from static nature. Hence, their historical relativism

forestalled higher values to distinguish between good and evil regimes, as Strauss argues in his book on *Natural Right and History* (1953).

Throughout his life, Strauss refrained from commenting on actual politics, at least publicly. His fundamental ideas, however, fertilized in an ever-growing school of old conservatism that applied his classical metaphysical philosophy to American history and politics. Following their mentor's insistence on eternal truth, it should come as no surprise that Strauss's American disciples have a particular interest in the foundation of the United States.¹⁸ On the occasion of the bicentennial celebration of the Constitution in 1986, numerous revisions of the most important American document appeared. Gordon S. Wood once criticized those revisions in the *New York Review of Books* with the following words: "Straussians have a lot in common with the lawyers and judges who believe that the meaning of the Constitution can be found only in the 'original intention' of its framers. [But] they are wrong to see the Constitution as having a timeless and universal meaning . . . discoverable through textual exegesis." Quoting Justice William Brennan, Wood argues that "the genius of the Constitution rests not in any static meaning it might have had in a world that is dead and gone, but in the adaptability of its great principles to cope with current problems and current needs." Wood concludes that Straussians are not really historians because they are not concerned with historical processes as a way to understand the past. Instead of interpreting the dynamics of American democracy, Straussians are eager to redefine its foundation. Accordingly, they are interested only in a few documents of the late eighteenth century, especially the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Taking into account that American political rhetoric, even on the level of everyday realpolitik, obsessively refers to the historical role, the principles and values of American democracy, Straussians insist that the foundational documents of the United States were not based on secular terms but on divine order.

Certainly, the Constitution does not lack substantial references to religion only because Thomas Jefferson and George Washington were Freemasons or because Benjamin Franklin was an agnostic who subscribed to the principles of the French and Scottish Enlightenment and kept a respectful but clear distance to God (Ostendorf 2003). That is to say, the Constitution has not been defined in secular terms because the founding fathers considered religion unimportant but because they

thought it was too important. They noted how religious conflicts between the single states threatened national unity. They realized that if the Constitution took a stand on religious quarrels, its chances of ratification would have been rather slim. Government, therefore, should best distance itself from direct religious interest and leave theological questions to the private sphere. As a result, religion has been released into a free-market system where countless denominations could evolve and where church leaders have had to learn the techniques of attracting potential members. In contrast, the descendants of New England Puritanism saw a more positive role for Christianity in national life. They too saw religion as tribal and divisive. But instead of leaving it to a *laissez-faire* market system, they were intent on uniting the nation under divinely sanctioned principles (Wilson 1990). And it is this strand that old and fundamentalist conservatives try to resurrect.

But if old conservatives argue that the separation of church and state was the biggest mistake made by the Founding Fathers, fundamentalist conservatives go a step further.¹⁹ Their discontent differs in a pivotal aspect from that of old conservatives. Fundamentalist conservatives not only bemoan the elimination of divine guidance from political decision making but repudiate any rational explanation of history and the universe in general, notably evolutionist theory.

Three main doctrinal components come together in fundamentalist conservatism. First, Pentecostalism's holiness teaching, which, in contrast to secular, enlightened worldviews, assumes a natural tendency to sin and evil in all human beings. This we already know from Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss. But if they believed that the natural tendency to evil could at least be restrained by politics, fundamentalist conservatives believe that the human disposition to sin cannot be overcome by individual, secular cultivation; it necessitates, rather, the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by unmistakable signs such as recovering from alcoholism and other dramatic experiences. Only the Holy Spirit's cleansing of the heart turns sinners into born-again Christians. The second doctrinal component is the emphasis on "*sola Scriptura*," which claims the authority of the Bible as the ultimate source of historical, biological, and universal interpretations. History and the creation of the world is foretold in scripture, and the sequence of historical events follows a divine plan that cannot be

explained by evolutionary theory or historical causalities. Darwinism, which explicates the development of the species by chance of natural selection, undermines the fundamentalist belief system at a critical point. It not only competes with the accuracy and authority of the Bible but is inconsistent with the idea that so complex and orderly a system as the universe could be designed by anything but God. Third, and most important, is dispensational premillennialism, which teaches that the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ is near. Believing in God's detailed plan for history's last days predicted in every detail in the Bible, premillennialists hold that the apocalypse will happen before long. They have no doubt that the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world will happen during their lifetime. A series of signs, particularly when they accumulate and intensify, anticipate the approaching end. Those will include wars, terrible plagues like AIDS, the accumulation of natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, and famines, not to speak of rampant immorality manifesting itself in abortion, homosexuality, promiscuity, feminism, genetic engineering, rock and roll, drugs, and alcohol.²⁰ The elimination of sin and evil is a precondition for the Second Coming of Christ and his establishment of a millennial kingdom (Marsden 1991, 39–44).

Apocalyptic interpretations of the world are at the heart of a growing fundamentalist culture industry in the United States. In his analysis *When Time Shall Be No More* (1992), historian Paul Boyer has explored the ubiquity and proliferation of, as his book's subtitle puts it, *Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. In contrast to supermarket tabloids whose headlines endlessly scream of UFOs and two-headed babies, prophecy writing is a specific genre linked to a fundamentalist belief system.²¹

The religious ideology of this extreme American conservatism can best be explained by a series of popular novels entitled *Left Behind*.²² The first book in the series of twelve installments was published in 1995. The plot of this series can be quickly summarized. In the first volume we are introduced to a Boeing 747 pilot named Rayford Steele, who is informed by one of the flight attendants that dozens of passengers have vanished in a single moment, their clothes neatly folded and left behind on their seats. Worldwide, the reader of *Left Behind* is informed, millions are gone, including all children. Pilots vanish from cockpits, drivers disappear from behind their steering wheels, and

fetuses disappear out of wombs. Among the missing are Steele's wife and son.

Most of those left behind remain clueless in trying to explain the disappearance, except for captain Rayford Steele, whose wife had become a born-again Christian before she and her son vanished. Steele knows what happened, and so does the reader of the *Left Behind* series: the Rapture has taken place, Jesus Christ has returned for a short time to physically lift sincere believers and innocent babies to meet him in heaven. Those left behind will face the "tribulation," which is a period of seven years in which all the cryptic predictions in the Book of Revelation come true. During this period of suffering the Antichrist, alias Satan, will rule the world and kill those who refuse to worship him.

Learned readers know what is at stake, because the basic ideas of the *Left Behind* series had been formulated in the mid-nineteenth century by John Darby, a British churchman, and had been popularized in the United States by Cyrus Scofield.²³ According to their interpretation of the Gospel, Christ was born for the purpose of setting up his kingdom. Since he was rejected by the Jews, he postponed the kingdom plans. Instead he set up the church as an interim institution. When he returns to rapture the church, he will first lift up into the air and rescue all true believers from the tribulation. According to prophecy believers, these will be literally 144,000 persons worldwide. However, there is hope for the billions left behind because at the end of the seven years of tribulation, Christ will return a second time to incarcerate the Antichrist and rescue those who in the meantime have converted to true Christianity, including Jews, Muslims, Catholics, and others who do not believe in evangelical Christian teaching. When Jesus Christ returns, he will literally restore national Israel, he will literally sit upon David's throne in Jerusalem, and he will literally reign for a span of one thousand years until the final judgment. During this period Satan, alias the Antichrist, will be imprisoned and only released at the end of the millennium for the final combat of Armageddon, an ancient battle site near Haifa, where he will be defeated and condemned to hell for all eternity.

Darby believed that the Antichrist would come out of Europe. Accordingly, prophecy believers identified the Satan-in-disguise as Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, Mikhail Gorbachev (who already had the mark on his forehead), the Pope, and last but not least, the Secretary

General of the United Nations. More recent interpretations of scripture suggest that the Antichrist could also come from the Near East. Thus, Ayatollah Khomeini, Osama bin Laden, and Saddam Hussein have been identified as the Antichrist. His name in the *Left Behind* series is Nicolae Carpathia, a close ally of the Pope. Carpathia is a handsome, urbane, but devious politician from Romania who started his ascent to power as Secretary General of the United Nations. Before long Carpathia presents himself as a global dictator who establishes a totalitarian, one-world government and introduces a single, global currency and a universal religion. Carpathia builds himself a massive capital city in Iraq, called New Babylon, from which he rules the world.

Two things are interesting to note in this plot element: First, during the Cold War, prophecy gurus focused on the Soviet Union, citing a passage in Ezekiel foretelling the destruction of a northern kingdom called Gog, which prophecy believers interpreted as Russia. Today's popularizers spotlight the United Nations. The U.N. has been a long-standing object of fundamentalist wrath because it potentially aims at a one-world government, a single world currency, and an ecumenical world order in which all religions are treated on an equal basis. This new world order not only interferes with the Kingdom of God; it competes with the American way of life as a solely Christian way of life and threatens American sovereignty and its role as a "redeemer nation."

Until George W. Bush took office, the Christian Right had hardly any influence on foreign policy, at least at the presidential level and, therefore, confined itself to domestic social issues such as prayer in school, abortion, and gay rights, as Duane Oldfield writes in his essay on the evangelical roots of American unilateralism. Although journalists, politicians, and academics continue to analyze the fundamentalists' effectiveness in these areas, their influence on American foreign policy and the Christian Right's pronounced unilateralism has remained widely unnoticed. Certainly, unilateralism is nothing new in the evangelical tradition. As early as 1959, the John Birch society already demanded "Get U.S. out of the U.N.," and the leader of the anticommunist Christian crusade, Billy James Hargis, declared three years later that "the primary threat to the United States is internationalism." New, however is the proximity of Christian Right unilateral worldviews to power. Although the impact of prophecy writing upon public opinion or the government's foreign policy can hardly be

measured, especially as lobbyists in Washington are eager to deny any apocalyptic motifs in the Christian Right's perspectives on the Bush administration's unilateral politics, it is hard to believe that the unilateral and xenophobic message of prophecy writing would not have any direct or indirect impact (Oldfield 2004).

The second noteworthy aspect is the link between the United Nations and Iraq, which has also been a target since long before the Second Gulf War. Particularly Babylon, Iraq's fabled capital south of Baghdad, has attracted much attention among prophecy believers. As mentioned in the Book of Revelation, Babylon owed its splendor to King Nebuchadnezzar, the same wicked ruler who took the Jews captive, seized Jerusalem in 586 BC, and finally destroyed the "City of God." Since there could be no revenge in destroying Babylon unless it existed, Saddam Hussein's ambitious plan, launched in the 1970s, to rebuild the old capital on its ancient ruins is seen as an essential step in God's unfolding plan. Babylon embodies all that is corrupt. It is the antithesis to Jerusalem. The foundation of Israel in 1948, the recapture of Jerusalem's Old City in 1967, the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and a future rebuilding of the Temple are, therefore, important signs of end-time events. The apocalyptic concern and the ensuing support for Israel is less rooted in a particular sympathy for the Jews as the chosen people than in the Holy Land as the physical site of God's kingdom. In the words of Christian Right author John Hagee, "Israel is the only nation created by a sovereign act of God, and He has sworn by His holiness to defend Jerusalem, His Holy City. If God created and defends Israel, those nations that fight against it fight against God" (quoted in Boyer 2003, B10).

If evangelical Christians are deeply connected to Orthodox Jews on matters of Israeli politics, this alliance can only be one of time. Jews need to make up for their "national sin" of having rejected Jesus and for delaying his millennium kingdom on earth. Translated into profane terms: Jews are to be blamed for preventing Christians from having been able to inhabit and enjoy God's millennial kingdom on earth much earlier. According to this prophetic belief system, Jews will survive the tribulation's new Holocaust only by becoming born-again Christians, which is to say that their choice comes down to an old one: repent and convert, or die. Not surprisingly, Jews worldwide have expressed profound unease with the dubious support of the Christian

Right.²⁴ But contempt for Jews is not the only disturbing message of the series. Its anti-Semitism is accompanied by its anti-Catholicism, not to speak of its contempt for Muslims, all of whom will be saved only if they convert. In the world of prophecy belief, there exists only a single truth: that of a fundamentalist reading of the Bible.

Certainly, this belief system may seem too bizarre or atavistic to merit scholarly attention, and one could readily ignore the phenomenon if it weren't for the tremendous success of its popularizers. Hal Lindsey's novel *The Late Great Planet Earth*, published in 1970, was already a bestseller and the first runaway success of prophecy writing. Reverend Tim LaHaye's and Jerry Jenkins's *Left Behind* series has by far exceeded Lindsey's success of end-time prophecies.²⁵ Most of the twelve *Left Behind* books debuted at number one on the *New York Times* and other bestseller lists. If the *Harry Potter* books sold 30 million copies worldwide, the *Left Behind* series sold twice as many in the United States alone. With more than 62 million copies, not counting millions of children's and graphic versions, audio books, or film and video adaptations, *Left Behind* is a cultural phenomenon that goes well beyond books.

Instead of condemning mass-cultural artifacts and strategies, as they did still twenty or thirty years ago, fundamentalist conservatives are now feverishly adopting popular forms to create a parallel world of entertainment, a consumers' paradise of their own with mugs, T-shirts, calendars, devotionals, interactive games, screen savers, bumper stickers, films, and videos. Hundreds of radio and TV luminaries, such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Joyce Meyer, and countless others, have developed different styles to attract a broad variety of specific audiences to promulgate the fundamentalist belief system. An impressive Web presence, numerous discussion and Bible groups, national conferences, package tours, community events, and broadcasted church sermons have evolved into mass-marketed sites for talking about fundamentalist concerns ranging from family life, child education, weight loss, and body piercing, to global missionary work and extreme prayer. Christian music from pop to rap to punk rock is the fastest-growing segment of the American music industry, not to speak of the rapidly expanding Christian book market.

Despite its tremendous success, the *Left Behind* series has received remarkably little attention in mainstream American culture and

academia. Over the past eight years, media coverage remained sparse, until two recent cover stories in *Time* (July 1, 2002) and *Newsweek* (May 16, 2004) and a feature on CBS's *60 Minutes* (February 14, 2004). Of the twenty-five American academics in the humanities that I asked about the *Left Behind* series, only one professor of religion has heard of it, whereas four out of ten staff members at the institution where I teach knew what I was talking about. In his review of the series, Gershon Gorenberg (2002b) made a similar observation: "When *Assassins*, book six in the series, was perched high on *The New York Times* bestseller list, top staffers at a major New York publishing house told me they'd never heard of it. Scholars of American religion admit to not having opened the *Left Behind* books." Both observations, though not empirical, are symptomatic of the fundamentalist divide that cuts America and the entire Western world. People committed to an ever-ascending process of secularization have difficulty understanding, and therefore ignore, this cultural phenomenon.²⁶

Considering the proliferation of fundamentalist ideas and their percolation into politics, let me conclude with four aspects:

1. It has often been argued that September 11 changed the world and America's relation to itself. In contrast, I would maintain that the terrorist attacks only accelerated and enforced a realignment in American politics that started much earlier, notably with the foundation of the Moral Majority in 1979 and the politicization of the fundamentalist movement.²⁷ Before then the Moral Majority was politically a silent majority. As Jerry Falwell declared in 1965, "We have few ties to this earth. We pay our taxes, cast our votes as a responsibility of citizenship, obey the laws of the land. . . . But at the same time, we are cognizant that our only purpose on this earth is to know Christ and make Him known" (quoted in Casanova 1994, 148). If fundamentalists engaged in politics at all, then, as in the 1930s, it was often with the Democratic Party, which had difficulties to keep the balance between the Christian Right in the South and the organized labor movement in the North. This all changed in the aftermath of the civil rights, the feminist and the gay-rights movements, and when in the 1970s the McGovern Commission opened the Democratic Party to what later became the "rainbow coalition," and when the Republican Party simultaneously started its "southern strategy." Although Richard Nixon was

not very successful in recruiting the fundamentalist movement, Ronald Reagan finally succeeded in politicizing the southern Moral Majority, which gradually integrated itself into the Republican Party. If in the beginning the GOP was the party of the fundamentalist movement, it is now the other way around; since the 1980s the Christian Right has transformed from an outsider social movement, to a conventional interest group, to a durable faction within a majority party that fights on all fronts.

2. Considering the ubiquity of fundamentalism both in the United States and worldwide, one has to recognize that in terms of secularization Europe is not the rule but rather the exception. If Europeans had been irritated by America's move from modernism to postmodernism, they are now startled by the reverse, that is, by what they perceive as America's partial but considerable conversion from secularism to fundamentalism, which to Europeans is still associated with a retreat from modern or postmodern to premodern concepts of culture. To the extent that President Bush has offended the majority of his European allies, it is particularly the fundamentalist rhetoric informing his secretive politics that surpasses Europe's profane imagination. The war in Iraq is the best example. Europeans could only understand the Bush administration's motives in rational and secular terms. To them, America's anxiety was only the camouflage for U.S. imperialism and geo-economic interests. That arguments about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and about his seeming relation to al Qaeda's terrorism might have been simultaneously a rationalization of fundamentalist motives—a translation of irrational impulses into rational political rhetoric to please the fundamentalist Christian Right—escapes European patterns of comprehension.

3. Ahistorical generalizations or insinuations of U.S.-America's ostensible fascism no longer suffice. A comparison of Leo Strauss's metaphysical political philosophy with that of Nazi ideologues would make this very clear. Although Strauss shared and even radicalized Heidegger's and Schmitt's resentment toward modern liberal democracies, he simultaneously abhorred their Nazi ideology, not only for its racism but also for what metaphysical philosophers have considered its merely secular millennialism. No less than Eric Voegelin, a German refugee like Strauss and one of his closest ideological allies, has made this very clear. Elaborating on the differences between fascist

rhetoric and religious thought as two opposing belief systems, Voegelin was the first who described fascist ideology as a “political religion” that only utilized cultic rituals and an unctuous vocabulary in order to sanctify a collective totality. In *The Authoritarian State* (1936) and *The Political Religions* (1938), he uncovered in National Socialist speculations on a “total” state a “religious idea” in which the individual is subsumed into a transpersonal being. Fascism, he argued, is rooted in religious experience in which fragments of the world appear as sacred, as best exemplified in Mussolini’s “Italita” and Hitler’s “Volksgemeinschaft.” Nazi ideology transposed “das deutsche Volk” into a “sacred substance,” which for Voegelin characterized only a “particular ecclesia” in contrast to Christianity’s “universal ecclesia.” Thus, fascism was only a flawed version of Christianity, which derived the unity and superiority of Germanness, a strong nation state, and finally the myth of a German millennium not from divine authority but from pseudo-scientific categories, most notably the concept of *ius sanguini*. With the corruption of Darwin’s evolutionist theory and despite for divine creationism, Nazi racism devalued and reduced the human being to cranial indices and phrenological parameters.²⁸ The Nazis’ fierce reaction toward Voegelin’s criticism forced him to emigrate to the United States in 1938, where he associated himself with metaphysical conservatives such as Leo Strauss, Russell Kirk, and others, who rejected any kind of scientific relativism and secular explanations of the universe.²⁹ If, for them, modern rationality in its humanist version of the Enlightenment as well as in its fascist distortions prevented divine revelations of truth and evaluations of good and evil, the same can be said about fundamentalist conservatives, who embrace a strong impulse against Hitler, the Nazis, and the Holocaust. Apart from the fact that this impulse does not prevent strong anti-Semitic sentiments within the fundamentalist movement, it should become clear that one doesn’t have to be a fascist ideologue to adhere to a form of conservatism that in its antimodern impulse even exceeds Nazi intellectuals like Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger.³⁰

Thus, instead of comparing the current political and cultural climate with the Weimar Republic’s “hard road to fascism,” one has to understand the United States on its own terms. Whether historians, political scientists, scholars in the humanities, or sociologists call it a “conservative revolution,” a “culture war,” a “return of the sacred,”

or a “deprivatization of religion,” the underlying paradigm remains the same: America established itself on two levels. On the *belle etage*, to use Berndt Ostendorf’s metaphor, it presented itself as a cosmopolitan, enlightened model of liberal democracy, whereas on the level below, it has stored a fundamentalist and populist subculture that despises the separation between state and church. The realignment of politics and fundamentalism and their coordinated influence on all aspects of life—from personal habits to social institutions—calls for a reconsideration of the secularization theory in American culture and politics. If comparisons are allowed, I would say that America has not fallen prey to fascism but is struggling over a new Great Awakening with serious consequences not only in politics but also in academia.

4. Academia itself needs to reconsider its relation to religion in general and fundamentalism in American culture and politics in particular. If the perpetual tension between secular and religious substantiations of American culture and politics has forced sociologists to reconsider Max Weber’s secularization theory, this revision had little or no effect upon literary theory. Focusing on the modern, enlightened tradition of literature and culture, literary scholarship has largely bypassed the fundamentalist segment in American society and its consequences for the theory, function, and interpretation of literature. In addition, if Henry Nash Smith once defined American studies as the study of “American culture as a whole, past and present,” the question arises whether the field has ever complied with this definition in the face of a residual fundamentalism. So far, American studies has concerned itself with those texts that in one way or another contributed to the notion of the United States as a modern liberal democracy. It has neglected religion as a pivotal category for the understanding of American culture or—following Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch—has at best treated religion as a historical phenomenon confined to the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The fundamentalist revival has imposed religion as a new category on literary and cultural studies insofar as the dividing line for fundamentalists does not run along race, class, gender, or nation but between those who adhere to the process of secularization in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and those who cling to born-again experiences, the literacy of the Bible, and divine order. For them, the American way of life as the Christian fundamentalist way of life is the baseline for a new world order.

Notes

1. It is interesting to note that scholars closer to the left than Winkler and Gleason consider Schmitt's role less dramatic. Chantal Mouffe, for example, writes: "In spite of his moral flaws, he is an important political thinker whose work would be a great mistake to dismiss merely of his support for Hitler in 1933. . . . Ignoring his views would deprive us of many insights that can be used to rethink liberal democracy with a view of strengthening its institutions" (Mouffe 1999, 1).

2. If Louis Hartz once remarked that the permissive character of American liberalism has been so deeply ingrained that its compulsive and totalitarian conformity has not only posed a threat to liberty itself but evades any self-reflexive criticism, the same can be said about religion, which is so fundamental in American thought that its mechanisms often remain unrecognized. The two unmarked categories differ, however, in a pivotal aspect. America's "natural liberal mind," as Hartz termed it, has produced an indiscriminate tolerance that relinquishes criticism even to the point where religious fundamentalism threatens the very tolerance it profits from. In repudiating the separation of church and state, for instance, which guarantees the respectful coexistence of various belief systems, fundamentalism tries to eradicate a cardinal constituency of liberal democracy.

3. It should be clear that I refer to the "European-American" dichotomy not in terms of place and space but as an analytical category that does not confine the attributes to either side of the Atlantic; nor should these attributes be understood in essential terms.

4. Already in the spring of 1950, the *Partisan Review* conducted a symposium on "Religion and the Intellectuals." There was considerable difference among the contributors as to whether the United States was going through a new religious revival, which for self-acclaimed "naturalists," "positivists," and "secular radicals" such as John Dewey, Sidney Hook, and Irving Howe was nothing more than escapism. In the introduction to the proceedings of a follow-up symposium sponsored by *Deadalus* eighteen years later, William McLoughlin and Robert N. Bellah wrote: "The doubters of 1950 essentially misunderstood the real nature of America's new wave of revivalism; it was nothing short of a Great Awakening. The postwar 'turn to religion,' which almost all of the contributors in this volume accept both as a fact and as a positive good, went much deeper and wider than prayer breakfasts, mass evangelistic campaigns, and anti-Communist crusaders. It constituted a general re-orientation of the whole social and intellectual climate of Western society, just as America's previous Great Awakenings had done." For a detailed discussion, see *Partisan Review* 1950 and Loughlin 1968, ix–x.

5. It seems unlikely that Habermas would still hold to this critique today. The open letter he published together with Jacques Derrida against the war in Iraq, and the eulogy of the late friend on the occasion of Habermas's seventy-fifth birthday, suggest that both considered their quarrels of minor importance against the backdrop of George W. Bush's "conservative revolution," the more so as their disagreement remained within the confines of secular philosophy.

6. Robert Devigne (1994) makes a similar point, arguing that neoconservatives emphasize the problematic postindustrialism created for liberalism, while Straussians focus on the theoretical roots of liberalism's degeneration (37).

7. Although George W. Bush considers himself a born-again Christian, it is hard to tell to what extent he believes in eschatological interpretations of the Bible and end-time prophecies. One thing, however, is obvious: his persistent use of biblical metaphors goes far beyond the American tradition of civil religion in presidential addresses. Bush's consistent allusion to the Book of Revelation (St. John) is designed to carry a specific message to the Christian Right, which expects acknowledgment for its tremendous support in the election of 2000. In a lengthy essay for the *New York Review of Books*, Joan Didion listed the rhetorical signals President Bush sends to the Christian Right. Discussions of end-times prophecies, apocalyptic explanations of history, and eschatological interpretations of politics, she writes, "no longer surprise us, at least those of us even occasionally exposed to Christian radio or television or Web sites." We recognize that many people in the government believe in creationist interpretations of the Bible as a reasonable alternative to Darwinian evolutionary theory. We accept without comment that "Bible reading is part of the President's daily schedule, . . . and that Bible study sessions take up a certain percentage of the White House week." We take for granted sentences like "I believe God wants me to be president," as well as his persistent use of the word "crusade" after September 11, designed to carry a specific message to fundamentalist evangelicals. We ignore remarks by his friends and advisors, who in reference to the war in Iraq disclose that the president "sees the world as a biblical struggle of good versus evil." Didion refers to Peter and Rochelle Schweizer, who in their book, *The Bushes: Portrait of a Dynasty*, quote a family member saying: "George sees [the war in Iraq] as a religious war. . . . His view is that [the Arabs] are trying to kill the Christians. And we the Christians will strike back with more force and more ferocity than they will ever know."

8. Carl Schmitt in his introduction to *Le categorie del 'politico'* (1972), quoted in George Schwab's introduction to Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* (6).

9. The two collections of essays edited by Deutsch and Nicgorski (1994) and Deutsch and Murley (1999) provide a broad survey of the range of questions and the disagreements among Strauss's most consequential students about how best to characterize his legacy. Shadia Drury is certainly the most important leftist critic of Strauss's work in North America. Although her perspective is that of a political scientist who sometimes misses Strauss's philosophical speculations, which sometimes leads to polemical and far-fetched interpretations of the practical consequences of his speculations, her critique is an indispensable contribution to the understanding of Strauss's political theory.

10. Harry V. Jaffa, one of Strauss's first-generation students, summarizes his mentor's explanation with the following words: "Modern rationalism comes to sight as the attempt to dispel the mystery of being by so radicalizing skepticism as to abolish skepticism from philosophy" (200). For Strauss, the uniqueness of biblical revelation "is the idea of the One God Who is separate from the universe."

We can “only know those things that have class characteristics that identify them as members of species or genera.” But since “the God of the Bible is not only One, but the only possible One . . . He cannot become an object of knowledge. And He cannot be imagined. A god that can be imagined would be a pagan deity. . . . This is why the second of the Ten Commandments forbids the making of images; that is to say, it forbids any suggestion that God can become an object of knowledge by being an object of sense perception. . . . There is therefore a clear and distinct epistemological reason why faith—and not reason—has primacy. To summarize: I cannot know anything of which there is and can be only one” (Jaffa 1994, 197). Creation as shown and reported in the first sentence of Genesis is something “that only God could have known or witnessed.” In other words, if God and the story of Creation as the highest things are unknowable, “then the highest capacity or virtue of man cannot be theoretical wisdom.” In Aristotelian philosophy, for example, “practical wisdom is in the service of theoretical wisdom” replaced in religion “by the study of God’s speeches and deeds” of which the Bible, the Torah, or the Law is a record. “Reason,” therefore, is not a human capacity but comes through the revelation of God in the words of the Bible, the Torah, and the Law (Jaffa 1994, 198).

11. For the relation between Schmitt and Strauss, see Meier 1995.

12. Among them are the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Le Monde*, *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

13. After leaving Chicago in 1968, Strauss briefly taught at Claremont Men’s College before he retired to the life of a scholar-in-residence at St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland. Among his books are *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), *Natural Right and History* (1950), *Thoughts on Macchiavelli* (1958), *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (1959), *The City and Man* (1964), *Socrates and Aristophanes* (1966), *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (1968), *Xenophon’s Socrates* (1970, with Allan Bloom).

14. Gordon S. Wood described Strauss’s impact as the largest academic movement in the twentieth century.

15. Some names of Strauss’s disciples should suffice: Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas; former Assistant Secretary of State Alan Keyes; former Secretary of Education William Bennett; the editors of the *Weekly Standard* and the *New York Post* (respectively) William Kristol and Norman Podhoretz; Chairman of the Council on Bioethics Leon Kass; Pentagon officials and advisors such as Abram Shulsky and Richard Perle; and, finally, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. Other students of Strauss who have assumed responsible positions in the administration are William B. Allen, former chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission; John T. Agresto and Jeffrey D. Wallin, former chairman and director (respectively) of the National Endowment for the Humanities; Robert Bork, whose nomination to the Supreme Court by former president Reagan was defeated by the Democratic party; and Seth Cropsey, who wrote the speeches for Caspar Weinberger. A more comprehensive list can be found in Deutsch and Murley 1999

(xiv, n. 4) and Devigne 1994 (221–22, n. 76). Devigne points out that he has collected these names from short biographies of contributors to books and journals.

16. Among the conservative think tanks are the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institute, the Cato Institute, the Center for Security Policy, and the American Enterprise Institute. The most prominent among these think tanks is the Project for a New American Century. Among its members are Florida's Governor Jeb Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Dan Quayle, William Bennett, Steve Forbes, Ronald Kagan, and Francis Fukuyama, to name only a few.

17. For Strauss, the judicial system of liberal democracies was the best example. What is legal in secular terms, he argued, is not always legitimate in religious terms. The conflict between legality and legitimacy, as he learned from Carl Schmitt, is the weakness of liberal democracies; they cannot be the same but stand in contradiction to each other.

18. Although Strauss confined himself to analyzing what he considered to be the shortcomings of modern liberal democracies in general, his disciples draw their own conclusions of how his writings apply to American history and politics. Almost unnoticed, they invaded political science and history departments across the United States, where they struggle to identify and mythologize American traditions. If in the 1950s and '60s they were voices crying in the wilderness, Straussians began enjoying their days in the sun with the support of a sympathetic Republican administration and the bicentennial celebration of the Constitution in the 1986. In the meantime, their interest has expanded to the field of American studies. And here, I am not only referring to Alan Wolfe's polemic against the works of Donald Pease, Robyn Wiegman, John Carlos Rowe, and David Noble in *The New Republic* (October 2, 2003), which Wolfe considers as hate speech rather than serious criticism; this is only the tip of the iceberg. If American studies, old and new, has quarreled about the origin of the field in mid-nineteenth century, Straussians have been working hard to uncover and revise this "tradition" at the beginnings of America.

19. Irving Kristol (1995) argued that it would be necessary to breath "new life into the older, now largely comatose religious orthodoxies" to reverse the error. Despite his own Jewish heritage, Kristol, like Strauss, does not care which religion America should reestablish. Any religious denomination would do it; and since it is not likely to be Judaism, Kristol encourages the Republican Party to court the Christian Right in America (146 and passim). See also the discussion on Kristol in Drury 1997 (147–49).

20. Postmillenniarists, in contrast, believe that the elimination of sin and evil is not a precondition for the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom but a long-term task within the overall Christian cultivation and conversion of mankind. It is against this backdrop that one has to understand the heated debates about gay marriage, abortion, or the mandatory classroom recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance including the phrase "under God," all of which the Bush administration wants to make a Constitutional issue.

21. Paul Boyer identified a number of key themes that herald the end of the days, among them the destruction of the environment, the atomic bomb, the threat of a nuclear war, and the appearance of the Antichrist. If prophecy belief plays its private role for individuals, it has political ramifications as well. "The direct influence of prophecy belief on nuclear decision making surfaced as an issue in the 1980s as the eschatological interests of several Reagan-administration officials became known." Asked about the subject, former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, for example, replied, "I have read the *Book of Revelation* and yes, I believe the world is going to end—by an act of God, I hope—but every day I think that time is running out." Interior Secretary-designate James Watt, questioned at his confirmation hearing about preserving the environment for future generations, replied, "I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns" (1992, 141).

22. See the highly informative review essays by Melani McAlister (2003), Gershom Gorenberg (2002b), and Paul Boyer (2003).

23. The premillennial view asserts that Jesus Christ will return again in order to establish an earthly, interim kingdom prior to the Final Judgment.

24. Gershom Gorenberg (2002a) has called this evangelical embrace a "strangely exploitative relationship," in which evangelicals love Israel primarily because they believe its existence proves that biblical prophecies are true. As Melani McAlister writes, "The history of conservative Christian anti-Semitism is no small issue here, and LaHaye himself is no small contributor to that history. LaHaye was active in the Moral Majority in the 1980s and was later forced to resign as co-chairman of Jack Kemp's 1988 presidential campaign for having called Catholicism a 'false religion' and for blaming Jewish suffering on the Jewish rejection of Jesus. More recently, in an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg in *Slate* magazine, LaHaye announced that 'some of the greatest evil in the history of the world was concocted in the Jewish mind.' 'The Jewish brain,' he added kindly, also 'has the capacity for great good.' LaHaye's crude views are hardly the norm among evangelicals, but the suspicion remains that the pro-Israeli positions emerging from the Christian Right are at best instrumental and at worst a dangerous enthusiasm for the impending destruction and/or mass conversion of Jews. The criticisms have led a few evangelical leaders, including Pat Robertson, to deny that biblical prophecy plays a primary role in their pro-Israel positions" (n.p.). Gershom Gorenberg adds, "Jenkins, a prolific ghostwriter, does the actual writing. LaHaye provides the ideas, the outline of apocalypse. That is reason enough to pay attention. For even if the back-of-the-book bio says nothing of his career as American culture warrior, LaHaye has served as a prominent comrade-in-arms of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Along with Falwell, LaHaye was a board member at the time of the Moral Majority's 1979 founding. He created the mid-1980s American Coalition for Traditional Values, which got out the vote for the religious right and played a key role in Ronald Reagan's re-election. In 1987 he served briefly as co-chairman of Republican Jack Kemp's presidential campaign, resigning after *The Baltimore Sun* revealed that he'd labeled Catholicism 'a false religion' in his writing" (Gorenberg 2002b, n.p.).

25. The series is conceived by evangelist Tim LaHaye and written by collaborator Jerry Jenkins. Before the publication of the twelfth and final book in March 2004, Tyndale House, the evangelical Christian publisher of the bestselling series, announced that bookstores had already bought the entire initial print run of 1.9 million copies of *The Glorious Appearing* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, which has become one of biggest surprise hits in American popular culture.

26. According to a *Time/CNN* poll from November 2003, 47 percent of Americans describe themselves as born-again Christians or fundamentalists. Abundant evidence makes clear that millions of Americans believe in Bible prophecies and end-time events. Various polls conducted over the past ten years show that 59 percent of adult Americans believe that the events in the Book of Revelation will come true. Forty-nine percent believe that the world will come to an end or be destroyed within the next few years, decades, or centuries. Sixty-one percent think that Jesus Christ will return to earth at some time in the future; 34 percent say that this will even happen within the next few years or decades. More than half of the American population (53 percent) thinks that the two World Wars, the Holocaust, the conflict between Arabs and Jews, AIDS, the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the crumbling of the Berlin Wall are fulfillments of biblical prophecy. Sixteen percent support Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon because biblical prophecies say that the Jews must control Israel before the Second Coming of Christ. Forty-three percent of Americans consider themselves supporters of Israel. Thirty-two percent attend services at a church or a synagogue once a week, 25 percent at least once a month, and 18 percent few times a year; that is, 75 percent attend services on a regular or relatively regular basis. All surveys are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,000 to 1,500 adults. The data was provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut on May 13, 2004 (www.roperweb.ropercenter.uconn.edu).

27. Berndt Ostendorf (2003) comes to the same conclusion. I want to thank Berndt Ostendorf for bringing the importance of Leo Strauss and Carl Schmitt to my attention.

28. Voegelin's distinction became essential to the conservative purging and sanitation of the German Catholic and Protestant churches after the war. In the meantime, this distinction has been criticized both for its confined understanding of religion and its blindness toward the churches' own involvement in anti-Semitism and the murder of Jews. Susannah Heschel's forthcoming book on the "Aryan Jesus," for example, provides a detailed and thorough analysis of the Protestant church's relation to Nazi ideology, its involvement in the regime's politics, and its legitimization after 1945. I thank Susannah Heschel for her most valuable suggestions and critique.

29. Voegelin taught at Louisiana State University before he accepted the Max Weber chair at the University of Munich in 1958. He finally returned to the United States in 1969, where he joined the Hoover Institution of War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University. He died in 1985.

30. Ironically, after 1945 Schmitt tried to correct his personal legacy by way of turning from Nazi ideology to Catholicism, claiming that he was only trying to give his own understanding of Nazi ideas. See the transcript of his Nuremberg interrogation in Bendersky 1987, 106–7.

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